

Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

An Enchanted Stream, Enchanted Fish and an Orphan Boy's Wonderful Discovery Made by a Quite Peculiar Accident

HAVE you ever seen the children of an orphan asylum taking a walk? All in line, all dressed alike in some striking color that marks them as fatherless and motherless, and all, or nearly all, wearing on their faces that look of parent-hunger; walking in step together with eyes listlessly fixed forward upon their guardian, the larger ones in front and trailing down to toddlers at the rear?

Everett was one of these foundlings. He had no other name than this, for he had been left upon the doorstep of the asylum, a tiny baby, on a winter night, and that was all that was known about him. He had grown to be the biggest boy in the asylum and was a sort of monitor over the smaller children, but the time had now come when he was to be released from all the rules and regulations of the place, for he was to go out into the country and work on a farm belonging to a man named Obadiah Manheim.

Of course Everett had not the least notion of what a farm was like. All he knew was that in the country there were tall grass, birds, bees, flowers, woods full of bears, lions, tigers and deer, for he had heard all sorts of strange tales in the asylum and believed every one of them. Of hard work he had had his share in the asylum and did not think about it at all, for all his life had been one long task.

He thought only that he would have all the bread and milk he wanted, apples, pears, strawberries, tomatoes, ride on horses and chop wood; for, strange to say, he enjoyed that sort of exercise hugely—very likely because he was rarely allowed to handle the axe—and he looked forward to his life on a farm with the keenest hopes. The other children envied him and wished they were big enough to leave, also, and doff the hideous blue garments that told everybody they were foundlings.

When the day came bringing Obadiah Manheim and freedom to Everett, all the children were allowed to shake the boy's hand and say farewell, and he drove away in the big covered wagon drawn by two clumsy horses, with a feeling of delight that caused a smile to hover about his lips, but soon Obadiah turned to him and asked in a very gruff voice:

"What are ye a-grinnin' at?"

"Nothing," replied Everett, quickly catching the gruff tone.

"Ye was a-laughin' at me!" snapped the farmer, as he struck the horses with his whip. "I won't have no brats a laughin' at me, lemme tell ye!"

"I was only feeling glad to leave the asylum," replied Everett. "I've never been in the country."

"Ye'll be sorry afore ye're much older!" said Obadiah. "Taint what it's cracked up to be, not by a long shot."

Everett soon found that life on a farm such as Obadiah Manheim's was not a bit better than life in the asylum. He was obliged to rise at four in the morning, and until eight o'clock at night there were few minutes that he was not busy at something. He was taught to milk the cows, water the horses, feed chickens, pigs, ducks and dogs, weed the garden, hoe corn, gather stones, saw wood, cut hay, churn butter, clean knives, wash windows, grind coffee, skim the milk, pick beans and peas, wash the dishes, mind the baby, dig bait when Obadiah wished to go fishing, hang out the clothes, pump water, cut up soap, shuck corn, make beds and do everything, in fact, that nobody else on the farm wished to do.

With it all he rarely had enough to eat, as Obadiah said too much food made a boy lazy. Of course he now and then picked up an apple to munch or got a good big drink of new milk when nobody was looking, for his gruff master sternly forbade such practices, but there were times when even a raw sweet potato was a delicacy.

Even Snuffy, the brown dog, seemed to get more and better food than Everett. More than once the thin, ragged boy stole half of Snuffy's meal to assuage the hunger that gnawed him.

All the time he was compelled to toil harder than any one in all that neighborhood, for he saw other farm-boys going fishing or riding on hay-wagons to town or swinging in the fruit trees with shouts and yells of glee, while he hoed corn or gathered stones in the broiling summer sun; and even when all his work was done, Obadiah refused to allow him to join the other lads and swim in the wide pool where the creek swept under the willows by the bridge. Everett wished to swim more than anything else, yet all the first summer he managed only twice to evade Obadiah's eye and splash to his heart's content in the cool, clear stream. But how he enjoyed those two treats!

He went to bed pale and exhausted, and it seemed that he had scarcely closed his eyes when he heard his master's growl calling him to rise and toil. One comfort he had: Obadiah's little daughter Dorothy pitied and loved him, endeavoring in every way possible to lighten his heavy burden, but she had few opportunities to assist him, as her father's eye was everywhere. Once he caught her giving the lad food, and she was sent to bed in the afternoon, while he was beaten with a halter strap.

After that the children rarely spoke to one another when Obadiah was at home, but Dorothy left food in hiding-places that Everett knew well, and her tender smile told him that she thought of him constantly.

In the fall, when work was light on the farm, Everett was sent into the woods to cut firewood for the winter, and he enjoyed this work. While his axe was ringing through the forest Snuffy chased rabbits from the brush heaps, the quail called "Bob White" from the fields, the partridge rose whirring from dead leaves, snipe whistled in the brook-sides and now and then he caught sight of a sly fox sneaking along a stone wall with watchful eye bent on the boy.

When the autumn winds sent the brown leaves scurrying and rattled down the chestnuts like hail,



"Out of the Brook Came Seven Men All Curiously Different"

his heart leaped in joy; but even then he had his sorrows, for when he had gathered a big bagful of nuts Obadiah beat him for wasting his time and then sold the nuts.

When winter came his lot was even harder, for although his stern master then permitted him to go to school, and to go to school was indeed a treat, for he went with Dorothy, his bedroom was under the roof, where the snow blew in upon the floor in drifts ankle-deep, and even in bed he was never warm. His clothes, old rags of Obadiah's, worn out before they came to him, were no protection against the blasts that swept along the roads, and his thin body seemed to shake with the cold every minute that he was outside of the well-warmed schoolhouse. But he managed to get through that winter, and when spring came he was the gladdest boy in Podunk county. Although gathering violets for Dorothy was forbidden by Obadiah, he always brought her a bouquet, and although May parties were not for him, he was as pleased as any when Dorothy was made Queen, and when summer came at last, nobody welcomed it with more joy than Everett.

In the winter he had discovered a deep babbling brook in the forest, and here he was determined to swim when summer came, for it was hidden in the trees and Obadiah would never find him. He learned how to do his work quicker, and therefore when his master was absent talking politics at the tavern he would slip away to the woods and plunge into the brook, where, half in delight, half in terror, he splashed for a few minutes and stole home again to toil. One day as he came homeward he found a deep pool into which the water flowed over a rocky fall, and here he thought he would bathe on the morrow. While he was working in the broiling sun the thought of that cool, deep water came to him, and as he looked at his skinny, thin arms he sighed and said:

"I wish I was as strong as the strongest man and had more meat on my bones!"

Then he took up his hoe and resumed work, but somehow, to his amazement, the earth turned up as if it were sand and the hoe seemed like a feather in his grasp. He stared at the hard ground, packed down by rain, and then his eyes fell on his arms, and he was astounded to see that they were big and round, and the muscles stood out like those of a blacksmith. What had happened to him? He felt of his arms and legs, for he could not believe his eyes, and then he jumped just to test the great, strong legs. To his surprise, he sprang into the air to the height of the rail fence. Then, like a deer, he jumped clear over it, and Snuffy, seeing this amazing feat, came barking from the barn.

It was plain that in a moment he had changed into an enormously strong, well-developed boy, but he could not explain the alteration. He finished hoeing his field in an hour, although the task would have taken Obadiah a whole day; and then, feeling thirsty, he went to the house for a drink. When Dorothy saw him she thought him a stranger, but when he spoke she recognized his voice and stared in bewilderment, for she saw a handsome, burly lad, who seemed to have been well nourished all his life, instead of being half-starved, as Everett had always been.

Everett told her what had happened, and she said the fairies must have done it, for she could think of no other solution of the puzzle. When Obadiah returned Everett was cutting up food for the cows, and he did not know him at all, but going to him, said:

"Here, young feller, what are you doing?"

"Doing my work, of course," replied Everett, looking around. Obadiah started in amazement and cried:

"Huh! Hang me if it taint Everett!" Then he stepped back and asked:

"What have you been a-doin' to yourself?"

"Nothing at all," replied the young giant, for that is what he was. "I just sort o' got strong and fat, that's all."

"There's some brooked trick here," growled his master. "You've been using witchcraft."

"Don't know where to find that sort of thing,"

said Everett, sturdily, "and if I did I wouldn't know how to use it anyway!"

"Don't give me any sass!" roared Obadiah, brandishing his whip. "I know that such a thing ain't natural, and it must be magic! Just you get back as you were before, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Not much," replied Everett, who, with strength had become quite assertive. "Not for all your farm! And don't you hit me!" he added.

Obadiah's whip began to whistle, and in another moment the lash fell about the boy's legs, but it did not hurt those hard muscles, as it had once done. In fact, Everett only laughed, which made the farmer whip harder, and then out rushed Dorothy in a fright.

"Oh, papa, do not whip him! Spare him!" she cried, piteously.

"Get out of my way, huzzy!" roared Obadiah angrily. "Or you'll get it, too!"

"Don't dare to strike her!" shouted Everett, as he saw his master raise the whip again.

"What," shouted Obadiah, "you dare to interfere? I'll show you!"

Then he lashed his daughter in his rage, but only once. The next moment Everett had him by the throat, and then, after shaking him as a dog does a rat, he hurled him against the side of the barn, which he struck with a thunderous crash.

He fell on the ground and lay there looking at the strong boy in a dazed manner for a few minutes, while Everett walked off with Dorothy. Then he got up, felt of himself all over to see if he had any broken bones and picked up his whip, after which he sneaked into the house like a whipped cur and told his wife that he had been assaulted by three tramps, for he was ashamed to say that his boy farm hand had so brutally battered him.

Everett, as he walked away with the dear little girl, said:

"I have stood all I can. It must end now, for he has whipped you, and that I can't stand. We may never see one another again, for I am going to run away at once, before your father goes and gets his gun and shoots me, for that's what he will do, I think, if I remain around here."

"Do not call him father, for he is only my stepfather," said the girl. "He never loved me, and I think he would be glad to get rid of me. Where will we go?"

"Are you going with me?" asked Everett in great surprise.

"Yes, I am tired of being abused and seeing you beaten and starved. We will go away somewhere together and never return."

"All right," replied the boy. "You may come. I am going into the woods and build a hut and live by hunting game and things."

"That will be fine!" she cried. "I will do the cooking and keep house. But we must take some things along to keep house with," she added. "When shall we start?"

"Right off," replied Everett. "It is not safe to stay here a minute."

"Wait," said Dorothy. "Wait while I steal into the house and see what he is doing." She ran off and soon returned carrying a frying pan, a small bag of flour, some bacon and eggs, all wrapped up in a big apron, and said:

"I've put a lot of other things just outside of the kitchen door. Run and get them. Nobody will see you, for mother is busy putting liniment on pa's lame back, where, he says, the tramps hit him with the clubs. Ma's awful sorry for him."

Everett ran and got the things—a hatchet, some matches, towels, a box of crackers, a lantern, a pail for water, and then stole off. Snuffy saw him and followed eagerly. They allowed him to come, for they thought he would be useful in the forest wilds, and they hurried away. By nightfall they were securely hidden in the deepest woods not very far from the pool, where Everett had made up his mind to bathe daily.

They slept beneath a great oak, and in the morning began to build a hut of hemlock boughs. It was completed late in the afternoon, and then Everett

thought of his swimming pool. Telling Dorothy to watch, and if she heard anybody approaching, to steal into the darkest underbrush, he went to the cool, gleaming sheet of water and made ready to take a swim.

Suddenly he noticed a great splashing on the surface of the clear water, and, looking in, saw that the pool was filled with fish of all sizes. "Aha!" thought he "here's where we can get many a meal, for they will be easy to catch, as I know where to find a net." He sat down to watch them darting about in the limpid stream. The water fell from the rock above into the pool with a loud, continuous musical murmur, and something peculiar in its sound caught his ear when he sat down, and arrested his attention, so that instead of plunging into the water he listened closely to the murmur.

In another moment he seemed to distinguish words, faint and indistinct at first, but when he bent over and held his ear close to the waterfall pouring down over the gray rock he soon caught a low voice speaking amid the water's babbling tones. Sometimes the words were lost, and again they came clear and distinct, but after a time he gathered what was said. This is what he heard:

"Who bathes above becomes what he will. Who bathes below becomes a fish."

Wondering, he repeated these strange sentences, and then, in some fear of what they might mean, he resumed his clothes and hurried back to Dorothy, to whom he repeated what he had heard. She pondered awhile and then said:

"Did you ever bathe in that brook?"

"Lots of times," he replied.

"But you never went into that pool beneath the waterfall?"

"No, never. I never saw it until lately. What of it?"

"You must have made a wish," she added.

Everett, having forgotten all about wishing to be strong, declared that he had never done so, but she said:

"It must be that you made a wish! Can't you understand, you foolish child? If you had bathed below the fall you would have been turned into a fish; but bathing above, you became strong and fat! It's a magic brook; I am sure of it, and can turn you into things. I shall at once go and bathe just above the waterfall!"

Before he could stop her she had vanished, and soon he heard her squeal as she felt the cold water of the brook about her. When she came back to him she had red hair!

"Geel!" he cried in astonishment. "What have you done?"

"I always wanted red hair," she replied. "I think it's just lovely, and so, the first thing, I wished for it, and I got it. It's twice as long as it was before, and much finer, and crinkly, too. That's just how I wanted it, 'cause dampness won't take all the curl out of it."

"Is that all you wished?" asked Everett.

"No; I asked to be pretty," stammered Dorothy, blushing deep.

"And you never changed a bit!" cried Everett. "That's 'cause you could not be any prettier than you were, you see!"

Then she blushed worse than before and was prettier than ever. She said hastily:

"It is time to get our supper, for we can't always live on crackers."

So Everett started to build a fire, but as he wished to make a sort of fireplace of stones, and they seemed to be all round stones thereabout, he soon grew impatient and exclaimed:

"I do wish we could build a real stove out of these stones!"

Then somehow he began again, and everything seemed to move as if by magic, and soon he had a fine fireplace that was just like a German stove, and he realized that he was able, by merely wishing, to do anything he desired. Of course, it would have been nicer, I suppose, had he been able simply to wish things done, but that was not the sort of charm that the magic brook dealt out. Everything he

How Little Everett's Joy Was Turned to Sorrow and Then Relieved By the Kindness of a Little Country Girl

wished done he had to do himself, but it was a great satisfaction to be sure he could do it, after all.

While Dorothy was cooking the batter cakes she had made, and, with her apron on and sleeves turned up, Everett was putting the finishing touches to their hemlock hut.

"It isn't very neat, nor very waterproof, either," said he, as he examined it carefully. "I wish I knew how to build a perfect one."

Then, as he wished, he saw what was wrong with it, and he hastily went to work to make it a habitable dwelling. As he worked more knowledge came to him, and he decided to begin next day a real log house and have a dwelling place suitable for both summer and winter. When Dorothy called him to come and eat he had an appetite that did justice to the good things she made, for she had been wishing for ability also as she cooked, and therefore produced wonders from the simplest materials, such as flour, bacon, berries and fruit. As they sat together she sighed in great content and said:

"I do hope they'll never find us, ever!"

"So do I!" rejoined Everett. "All I want is to be left alone here until we grow old."

"But before that we will get married!" exclaimed Dorothy sedately. Just then Snuffy began to growl excitedly, but in a low tone, and, looking through the dense shrubbery, they saw Obadiah moving stealthily through the forest. Both stole into a mass of brush like a couple of rabbits, followed by the dog, and they all held their breath, but the farmer never came near them. After waiting nearly an hour they came out and went to their hut. The sun was setting, and they made their beds of fragrant hemlock boughs, after which they sat and watched the stars come twinkling out one by one until the said man came and they went to bed.

They lived in the woods secure from pursuit, for nobody except Obadiah believed they had courage enough to lead such a life, and they were very happy all the time. One day Everett went to the creek and borrowed a net which was hidden in a place he well knew, for he had determined to catch some of the fish in the brook for dinner, but when he returned with it over his shoulder Dorothy asked what he wanted it for.

"We will have some of those big fish to-night," he replied, smiling.

"Why, Everett!" she cried in alarm. "Don't you think they may have been people who have bathed in the brook below the fall? Do you not remember the words of the brook—'Who bathes below becomes a fish'?"

"I never thought about that," he said. "Perhaps you are right."

"I am quite sure," she added, "for if one pair of the words came true, of course the other must be also."

"Then we must make certain before we catch them," said he, thoughtfully. "I do wish that I knew whether they have been men or not, and how to restore them to their former shapes."

"So do I, I am sure!" exclaimed the girl.

Instantly, of course, the knowledge came to them, and both thought at once of taking the fish out of the pool and placing them in the water above the fall and wishing they were men.

In an instant Everett rose, and taking the net hurried to the pool, where in a jiffy he had dipped in and cleverly captured seven fish, which, flopping desperately, were carried above the fall and dropped into the stream while Dorothy wished.

Then to their astonishment out of the shallow water emerged men, and very remarkable men they were! One wore a suit of armor, all gold and jewels, another a fur coat as shaggy as a bear's, another a long red gown, while the fourth and fifth to appear were attired in velvet and brocade clothes trimmed with fur and wore jeweled swords; the sixth was dressed in leather of a rusty brown, while the seventh was clothed in a striped robe with a sash about his waist, wore a turban on his head and carried a curved sword and a long lance.

They bowed low before the two children, and then thanked them for rescuing them. Everett could not understand what they said, although, of course, it was impossible not to comprehend what they meant, but suddenly he thought of the charm and promptly exclaimed:

"I wish I could understand every one of them!"

"So do I!" echoed Dorothy.

So, of course, they instantly understood all that was said by each rescued man, and they were so filled with astonishment at what they heard that they could not reply at first. Everett cried out when he had heard enough to understand it all:

"There must be more in the brook!"

"Only two others," said the tall man who wore the red gown. "You caught nearly all of us."

"Show me the others," cried the boy, eagerly. "I'll get them out at once."

The man in the red gown followed him to the pool and pointed out two fish that were looking up at them, while they remained as motionless as pebbles among the others that were darting to and fro in the limpid water.

"There they are, those two with the ruby spots on their sides that look like trout," said the man with the red gown.

Everett caught them up carefully, and they made no endeavor to escape while he carried them above the waterfall and slipped them into the stream, uttering the same wish he had before expressed.

Out waded two more men, one a big, burly fellow who was dressed in hunting clothes with a breech-loading gun in his hand, and the other clad in a funny suit of all colors, which Dorothy instantly recognized as the attire of a court clown, for she had seen pictures of such in a book at home.

Now, alas, I have come to the end of the page and have no more room, so the rest of the story must wait, while Dorothy and Everett sit by the brook and get acquainted with the remarkable men who had been fish.

WALT McDUGALL.